



Easter Sunday
Your Life Depends On It
Pastor Ted Cunningham

Today, we are talking about what your life depends on. I don't know but every Easter... it just seems this week, as we are trying to focus on Holy Week, a lot of stuff begins to happen that just doesn't matter. Did anybody have a week like that? Things that we tend to focus on that have absolutely nothing to do with the week and can be a distraction.

So, as the weather is warming up... I don't know if this happens at your home, but mice find their way into our home, which means our house goes on the market every April. Amy tells me, "Hey, we have to sell the house." "Why?" "I found a mouse." "Or we could just set a mouse trap. That would be another way to do it." I tell her to never worry about it because the snakes are soon to follow. The snakes come after, and we'll get them in the glue trap.

But my son was talking to me about math this week. I've always taught my children as they were going through school, "Don't worry about math; you're never going to use it." And the math teachers all cringed with that. Stressing over a math test. I don't know what has hit your home this week but, in our home, and with our family, we have stayed focused no matter what comes against us.

I need you to know that the message today, what we're celebrating today, your life depends on it. This is a life and death message and today we start as the angel declared to the women in Matthew 28: 6, **6 He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.** And today we celebrate the resurrected Jesus.

Last year, a friend of mine sent me this picture from the empty tomb in Israel and it's the Trip Adviser post. I don't know if you can tell that, but on Trip Advisor, the empty tomb has been given 4.5 out of 5 and that's the very definition of a tough crowd. I sent that to Travis Bawner yesterday and he simply responded with, "What else does a guy need to do to impress you?" Years ago, I heard a pastor say it, and I've been quoting it ever since. He said, "If a man predicts his own death and pulls it off, you should listen to whatever that man says.

And today, we celebrate the resurrected Jesus, 2,000 years later. I don't know what denomination you may be coming from today, but I love how John Ortberg points this out and I like to share it every couple of easters. He says, "*Two thousand years later, Pentecostals are still shouting about it.*" It was really hard for the Pentecostals to sit during that first song. We started actually singing about dancing and you were still sitting. That was hard for you.

“The charismatics are still dancing about it. Baptists are still amening it. the Presbyterians are still studying it. the Episcopal are still posting it. The Catholics are still standing, kneeling, standing kneeling... on this day.” today, we celebrate that the tomb is empty.

I talked to a couple this week who still had questions about the actual event of the resurrection. And maybe you found your way here today with friends or family and you still have questions like looking for proof, evidence of the resurrected Jesus. I want to encourage you to find your way to this book written by Lee Strobel. It’s simply called *The Case for Easter*. It’s a quick read but it’s a powerful read.

I want to begin with three main points that he makes out of *The Case for Easter* as he begins with this. “Scholars agree Jesus was dead.” That’s actually evidence because the swoon theory, which was floated for centuries... It’s the idea that Jesus went unconscious on the cross, was laid in the tomb unconscious, and then came to. In his book, Lee Strobel says, “We have no record of anyone anywhere ever surviving a roman crucifixion. Even according to the Journal of the American Medical Association, which says, “Clearly the weight of the evidence indicates that Jesus was dead even before the wound to his side was inflicted.” Scholars agree that Jesus died.

Here is convincing evidence. Opponents of Jesus admitted the tomb was empty. Those who hated Jesus, those who put Jesus to death had to do something with the fact that the tomb was empty. So, we know Jesus died and we know there is an empty tomb.

We read in Matthew 28: 12-15 the scheme. You might call this a conspiracy theory. They had to come up with why the tomb was empty. For one, to save the soldier’s life that were guarding the tomb, but also to appease the governor.

Matthew 28 - 12 When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, 13 telling them, “You are to say, ‘His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ 14 If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” 15 So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

Jesus died – scholars agree. The opponents of Jesus admitted the tomb was empty; they just had to come up with an answer for it. And then the last piece – Eyewitnesses encountered the resurrected Jesus.

We read in 1 Corinthians 15 - **3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance..... You have to get this, this is the gospel here. It’s of first importance What he is saying is *that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. 6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.***

Lee Strobel makes a fascinating observation on this particular text. He says, "I went to a psychologist friend and asked if it could be possible that five hundred people who claim to see Jesus after he died... 'Is it possible that it was an hallucination?'"

The Psychologist said, "Hallucinations are an individual event. If five hundred people have the same hallucination, that's a bigger miracle than the resurrection."

Scholars agree that Jesus died on the cross. Opponents agreed that the tomb was empty, and they had to come up with a reason for why. Eyewitnesses found the reason and it was in the risen Jesus, the resurrected Jesus.

In 1 Corinthians 15: 17-18, we get our outline for today to see that yes, your life depends on it, your marriage depends on it, your family depends on it, everything we're doing here today depends on why we are here today. Paul says to the Corinthians - **17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile...** What I'm doing right now doesn't matter. Preaching doesn't matter, listening to a sermon doesn't matter, you worshipping doesn't matter, your prayers don't matter. If Christ hasn't been raised from the dead, none of it matters. More than that, he goes on to say, **...you are still in your sins.** You are still walking around dead men and dead women. **18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.** Falling asleep there is the biblical word picture for death. Those who have died are lost forever.

It's a special time every Easter. I always take today and try to text or call those in our church, friends and family of those in our church who have lost loved ones in the past year. Because today is a difficult day. Today is a day where they're celebrating their first easter without their loved one. It's a day of mixed emotions because they're here without their loved one and at the same time, they are celebrating life after death. They are celebrating victory over the grave. They're celebrating what Jesus said when he said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, they will live even though they die."

Today, I want you to know that your church family mourns with you. We mourn with you during this day as we celebrate the resurrected Jesus.

Your faith depends on it. Even if you are not Baptist, let's all do the word *amen* on this one right here. 1 Corinthians 15: 20. After it is read... This is our only responsive reading for Woodland Hills for the day, but you respond with amen. **²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead.** Amen. And so, our faith has purpose. Our sins are forgiven and there is life beyond the grave.

But when we talk about our faith, Paul made several observations that are clear. He said, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection." I think we can talk about the resurrection, but sometimes, followers of Jesus, we forget about the power that comes with it. And this is something we say over and over again all throughout the year at our church. We believe the same power that raised Jesus from dead is the same power that raises your lifeless soul. We believe that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is the same power available for you today to raise your dead marriage.

It's the same power that's available to you today for those of you who have a dead relationship with your child or with your parents. For those of you who have drifted in your faith, and you feel like your faith has been lost for a long time, I want you to know it's the same power available to for you today – the same power that raised Jesus from the dead.

We read in Ephesians 1: 18 -20, Paul says, **18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened** (open) **in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe.** Every time I read this I think about my mentor, Dr. Gary Smalley. He used to say, “Whenever we’re going through difficulties in life, whether it be in a job or a relationship, we start to work for our own power. If you were here ten years ago, he used to stand here and go, “You're going through a difficult relationship? Let me tell you what won't work (trying to solve it on your own power). It's still tough at the end of that because my power doesn't cut it. We use the word power but what are we really using? It's control. We just think, *If I can get control of this situation...* Some of you today need to drop the control and cry out for the power, the power that is available because Jesus has been raised from the dead. It's an incomparably great power for us who believe. **That power is the same as the mighty strength 20 he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.**

That's been my prayer this week as I've been catching mice and talking about math, that those of you who feel powerless in your life would cry out today not to get control because there is a lot out of your control. There are a lot of things that we can control, but there is a lot we can't control. I've learned over the years you can't control people. Would life be a lot greater if you could control people? Stop it. Don't do that. “I'd be happier if...” “Why don't you...” Listen, let's drop the control and cry out for the same power that raised Christ from the dead that's available for us today. We believe in our faith. We share our faith has purpose because of the resurrected Jesus. We live out our faith and five purposes for our life and five purposes for our church; it's the same.

Worship – This morning was just a small snapshot. I sat in the first service. It was very emotional and I got up afterwards, and I'm just sitting there going, *Wow, what a time to worship.* But you need to know worship – that purpose – is more than a day of the week. It's more than something we do in a building. It's more than music. It's offering our lives as a living sacrifice, expressing our love to God. That's one of the purposes of our faith.

Fellowship – I love the purpose of fellowship. It's why we serve coffee at our church. We hope you get here early, get a cup of coffee, and fellowship with others. We hope during the week in Bible studies and through home groups, you're connecting with other people. If worship is expressing love to God, fellowship is enjoying the love of one another. Being loved and loving, celebrating and being celebrated, caring and being cared for. That's fellowship.

Discipleship – becoming more like Christ. We take the words of Jesus and the teachings of Christ seriously at this church. We want to be more like Christ.

Ministry – You participated in ministry already this morning when you gave. That is just one way that we meet needs in love. We've been meeting needs as a church now for over 20 years. Our encouragement to you is all of this. It has purpose because of the resurrected Jesus.

Evangelism – declaring the good news of Jesus. At the end of this service today, we are going to invite you to accept that good news and step out with the 40 that are being baptized today and say, "Hey, I'm going to step into the water, making a public profession of my faith."

Your faith depends on this day. your forgiveness depends on it. We read in 1 Corinthians 15: 3 - **3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.**

Some of you came in here today... I believe this is one of Satan's greatest lies that he likes to feed people today. There are a couple of them, but I believe this is one of the main ones. **"You're too far gone.** If I look back over your life, it's just too much. You've done too much wrong and there's no way you can be redeemed." I meet people all the time who if they don't say it out loud, they express it in their emotions when they are talking to me and they have this idea that they believe there are unredeemable. We do not believe that at this church and that is not what the Bible teaches. You are redeemed because of Jesus.

What does the scripture say in 1 John 1: 9? **9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.** You are not too far gone. Just like we believe your marriage is not too far gone. Your family is not too far gone. You're like, "Well, it's dead." Well guess what? You can't have a resurrection without a death. And we believe the same power that breathed life into Jesus is the same power that raises your life, your marriage, your family. That I'm too far gone is one lie.

I think another lie Satan likes to feed people is **"I'm not that bad."** I told you this last year. I have a problem comparing my physical health to the physical health of other people. Amy says that's a terrible strategy. Stop pointing to people you think you are healthier than. Don't compare yourself to people and be like, "Well, I'm not going to work out today because I'm in better shape than he is." That's a horrible way to measure your life. We do it all the time with our sin. "Yeah, I know I'm not perfect, but do you know about that guy?" "Do you know what she's done?" Stop comparing your life to others and start crying out to Jesus who cleanses us, who frees us from our sins.

So, your faith depends on it, your forgiveness depends on it, and this one we can get excited about. Your future depends on it. There is hope beyond the grave. There is victory over the grave.

The last couple of weeks, I was studying Steven Hawking. Many of you might know that name and those of you who enjoy studying science, you know he's a physicist and an author, and, at the time of his death, he was the Director of research at the Center for Theoretical Cosmology at the University of Cambridge. Here are some of his thoughts. He says, "There is no God. No one directs the universe." And then he says, "I regard the brain as a computer which will stop working when its components fail."

“There is no heaven or afterlife for broken down computers. That is a fairy story for people afraid of the dark.”

He passed away five years ago. When I read that... Some of you might have that same thought and I need to tell you, “According to the scripture, you are an image bearer of almighty God. When I stand before a group like this, I always want to remind you. Every single person in here... I don’t have to ask, I don’t have to question, I don’t have to even know your story. Every single person in here is created in the image of God with automatic intrinsic value. You are not a computer that will one day turn off and be gone. You are an image bearer of almighty God. Through creation you are an image bearer, but, as we’ll see in a second, it’s through salvation that you become a child of God. There is a difference between being an image bearer and a child of God.

A Couple of weeks ago, Amy and I were in London England. I wanted to go to Westminster Abby. I’ve been there once before about ten years ago and I wanted to go again. I wanted to see the Queen’s grave. It wasn’t until after I was in there that I was told that she was not buried there. So, you should really do your research before you start paying \$27.00 a ticket to get into a church. I’m standing inside this big church going, *Man, they brought in a hundred grand already and it ain’t even noon.* There were a lot of people there. I was thinking about that for Easter, but then I thought we probably shouldn’t do that at Woodland Hills.

So, once I found out she wasn’t there, I’m just waking... I mean there were thousands of people. I don’t know if you’ve been to Westminster Abby. I walked by this of C.S. Lewis... Now, he’s not buried there. He’s buried at the Holy Trinity Church just outside of Oxford. But I stopped and I had to Google because I didn’t know he was buried there. I Googled and saw he’s not buried there. I’m like, Man, I should get a map or something. I have no idea what’s going on inside this church. But at the 50th anniversary of his death, they placed this here at Poets Corner. I just want to read it. “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen. Not only because I see it, but because by it, I see everything else.”

It was a moment for me as I’m standing there. I take the picture, I call Amy over, and I’m Googling to be like is he here? No, he’s not here. I look across the way and I see a lady kneeling down. This is only the second time in my life... When we visited Graceland, I just remember going by the grave of Elvis and just people.. They’re not crying but sobbing, like mourning the death of Elvis. That’s the level of what I saw in this lady across the way. She was kneeling down in kind of like a prayer position. And she was very emotional. Obviously, I’m intrigued and want to go over there, but I want to give her space. I wait until I think she’s wrapping up. I walked over there and as I’m walking over there, she leans down to the ground and kisses the ground. She then gets up and leaves. She was standing over the grave of Stephen Hawking.

We’re trying to walk and have our time in the city and I’m Googling, trying to learn more about all of this. It stayed with me the day and honestly, the rest of the week. I had a very clear picture at that moment with her emotional and leaning to the ground and kissing his tombstone... It was the picture of mourning without hope. Now mourning is part of the human condition so all of us mourn, all of us will mourn.

But according to 1 Thessalonians 4, there are only two ways to mourn. You either mourn with hope or you mourn without hope. And today, because of Jesus and the resurrected Jesus, when a loved one dies in Christ, we mourn with hope. We don't mourn as the rest of men mourn.

So, what do you do to try to deal with this sin problem. The Bible says for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. So, those who say, "Okay, I believe in resurrection. What am I to do with this? I understand we are all sinners. What do I do with this?" I want to just share with you five lines that we've heard from people over like, what am I going to do with my sin problem?

There are many in here that believe:

I'll fix it. We call this salvation by addition and salvation by subtraction. There are those who believe to be good with God, "I'm just going to start doing a bunch of good stuff. I'm going to add good things to my life." I've heard this from believers. They say, "At the end of my life, I hope the good Lord lets me in." And I'm going, I need to explain this to you again. It's not by your works that heaven is your home. Your works are the overflow of your salvation, not the source of it. So, it's not about adding good things to your life and it's not about subtracting things from your life. There are those who believe you know I say it every time I walk out of that establishment getting in the uber going I'll never do this again. God would you..." Let me tell you, he will forgive you, but I need you to understand what you've done or what you promise you'll do in the future is not your salvation. You can't fix it.

I'll be good. I think we do this a lot. We compare our lives to the lives of other people. "I'll be good and I'm definitely better than that person there." You've heard it said that there are going to be some people in heaven that you meet and you're going to be like, "No Way! You gotta be kidding me." And there are going to be some people that see you and they're like, "No Way! How did his happen?"

I think this one is a big one in our culture today. **"I'm a loving person."** We do this too. I'm more loving than that person." There are some of you in here that you have Christians in your family that don't act all that loving. And your like, "I'm obviously more Christian than that guy." It's not about the amount of love that you have that determines your salvation.

Some of you say, **"I attend church."** Now I don't do a lot of cliché preaching so this is it. I'm going to give you my one cliché line. Just because you stand in a garage does not mean you are a car. And just because I sit in a dugout does not mean I'm a player. And just because you sit in here today, does not mean you are a Christian. Church attendance, goodness – no.

"I give to charity." "I give a lot of money to charity. Just did taxes and I was able to put that check line in my itemized deductions..." It's not about that. All your goodness, effort, attendance, kindness, and love have absolutely nothing to do with your salvation.

This week, I posted a clip we've shared here before from a great preacher named Alister Begg. The video is two minutes and two seconds. It's called The Man On The Middle Cross. I want to encourage you to go home and watch that. Just to give you a brief summary of it, the thief on the cross is in heaven. He's met by an angel who asked the question, "Why should I let you in?"

The thief's face... he's kind of shocked himself. This Angel goes, "Let me get my supervisor. We have to figure some things out here before we let you in. But let's start with scripture. Do you believe in the doctrine of justification by faith?" The guy goes, "Never heard of it." Not to give the punch line away, but at the end, the angel Asks, "Why should we let you in?" The thief says, "The man on the middle cross said I could come." It's a great clip, a great understanding of the gospel.

I know we all like that and then we start talking about it, but it's what Alistair Begg says right after that that we need to understand. When you are asked about your salvation, when I start in the first person, I've automatically gone wrong. We like to say "I," But Pastor Begg says, "Not I but He." When asked about your salvation, it should always start in the third person because He, and He said I can come. It is not about me. And maybe this is our theme as a church throughout the remainder of this year. I need you to know this today. You're not good enough to save yourself. At the same time, you're not too far gone for Jesus. Your marriage is not too far gone, your family is not too far gone. On your worst day, you're not too far gone.

You're like, "Ted, I want to be saved. What must I do to be saved." Romans 10: 9 -10 - **9 If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.** Not hopefully or like just try it and see if it works. No, you will be saved, declared righteous because of He, not me. **10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.**

For those of you who need prayer today, the prayer team is going to be down front. Pastor Rex is going to be standing out by the baptismal and would like to invite you to go share with him. I'm going to step around the back and be outside. Would love to meet you there. I know a lot of churches have altar calls where you come forward for salvation, but today, we're inviting you out that way and over there. We would love to have you step into the water. Shay will baptize you today on this Easter Sunday.

Father, today, as we are reminded of the gospel, as we are reminded that Jesus died and rose again, that this isn't just a message for one day of the year, but this is our message year around. So, today, we have come to the empty tomb, we see that it is empty, we know that the resurrected Jesus still saves today, and for that, we are grateful.

For the one who has never placed faith in Jesus, that today would be the day of their salvation. For the believer in Christ right now who needs the power of the resurrection in their life, that today they would cry out for that, that they would seek that in every area of their life because our life depends on it, our faith depends on it, our forgiveness depends on it, and so does our future, and we are grateful.

It is in the name of Jesus that we pray it... Amen.